

26.09.2020 A STEP IN FAITH

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:5-7

“And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.” 2 Corinthians 4:13, 14

God wants us to be like Him, to have the prodigal heart of the heavenly Father. He sent His son to seek and save that which was lost. He wants to gather all His fallen sons and daughters to His home. He seeks the foolish, the ignorant, the indifferent, the rebellious – He wants none lost.

Do we have a heart like God for the world? Do we have a burden for souls? Have we a burden in our hearts for their eternal destiny?

Jesus' Self-Sacrificing Love

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

For we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, that you, through His poverty, might be rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

It was love that motivated Jesus Christ to come down to earth and become a Man so that He could save mankind. While on earth, He put away His divine properties of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. As a man He had to live by faith in His Father who had sent Him and who had promised Him that He would reap the rewards of His sacrifice, for He would provide redemption for mankind.

His faith was most severely tested on the Cross, for the people mocked Him saying, *“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. **He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him;** for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* Matthew 27:42, 43

But Jesus remained faithful to His mission and because of His faithfulness to God and love for mankind, we are redeemed.

Commitment's Call

The Call of Peter and Andrew:

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Matthew 4:18-20

Jesus had met Andrew and Peter nearly a year earlier in Judah; close to where John the Baptist was preaching. Now He meets them again by the Sea of Galilee and calls them to follow Him.

1. The call to follow Jesus means leaving the world behind... *‘they immediately left their nets and followed Him.’*

2. Following Christ often involves leaving lucrative professions. Galilee was the bread basket of Palestine and the Sea of Galilee provided a very lucrative trade for fisherman. It was not just local trade; the great highways to Egypt, Rome, Phoenicia and Babylon ran through Galilee and its produce was exported to other countries.
3. The call to follow Jesus always leads to a higher calling... *"I will make you fishers of men."*
4. Jesus is the true Master of fishing, whether of fishes or of men; we must commit ourselves to His methods and tools rather than our own.

Matthew:

As Jesus passed on from there (His own city), He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. Matthew 9:9

Like Andrew and Peter, Matthew immediately leaves his lucrative job and follows Jesus.

Paul: God's Chosen Vessel

It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. Galatians 1:15, 16

*"While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, ¹at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' **Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.**" Acts 26:12-20*

Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house (in Rome), and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. Acts 28:30, 31

We are all familiar with the story of Paul – Pharisee of the Pharisees, a brilliant theological and legal mind, persecutor of the early Christians, whose life was dramatically changed by a vision of Jesus on the Damascus Road. He obeyed the call of Christ and became the great Apostle to the Gentiles, the one who laid out most clearly in the New Testament the theology of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His ministry meant he underwent great suffering and persecution for Christ's sake and the sake of the gospel. Here is his response to persecution for Christ's sake:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh...

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:7-11, 18-20

*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death**, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:7-11*

The Demands of Love

“The love of Christ compels us...” 2 Corinthians 5:14

Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” John 6:68, 69

As we look at Peter’s life - the transformation from rough fisherman to saint of God – we are encouraged; for it is thus that God changes all who choose to follow Him. Peter’s life is marked by sublime declarations of faith (Matthews 16:13-17), by impetuosity, claims of self-sufficiency and many failures of faith. And yet, by the end of his life, this man who declared that suffering was not to be the path Christ trod and had to be severely rebuked (Matthew 16:21-23); this man who tried to defend Christ by the sword - writes to his flock, encouraging them to suffer persecution for Christ’s sake with humility and grace.

“He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. Go, tell His disciples—and Peter” Mark 16:6, 7

The result of Peter’s denial of Jesus and the love shown to him by Jesus, was that it led him to place no trust in himself. After the resurrection, when Jesus asked him ‘Lovest (*agapeo*) thou Me?’ Peter answered that he loved Jesus with human (*phileo*), not divine love (John 21:15-19). The third time Jesus asked the question, Peter was grieved because Jesus used Peter’s word for love...‘do you only *phileo* Me’.

It was to Peter, the disciple who had lost all confidence in himself, that Jesus gave the task of feeding His sheep and His lambs. Peter was now ready to do what Jesus had said earlier in Matthew 16:19 ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven’.

A key suggests a door. Peter was to be the great Evangelist of the apostolic church. Through his preaching of Christ to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) and to the Gentiles in Joppa (Acts 10:1-48), he ushered men and women into the Kingdom of heaven.

And yet, Peter was not perfected at his repentance and at Pentecost. He kept growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. From fisherman, he became an evangelist, a fisher of men. Finally he became a shepherd of the flock entrusted to him, nurturing them and strengthening them in the faith. He was counted worthy to suffer martyrdom for Christ.

Love’s Commitment: the Cost and Rewards of Discipleship

Every apostle, except John the Beloved, suffered martyrdom for Christ. Jesus told Peter of his own martyrdom.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.” John 21:18, 19

Peter, who did not want Jesus to suffer, was transformed by the love of Christ. He was willing to follow Christ even unto death.

In his letter, he wrote:

In this (salvation) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9

But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. 1 Peter 2:20. 21

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. 1 Peter 3:14

*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; **but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.** 1 Peter 4:12, 13*

Conclusion:

Jesus asks us to count the cost of following Him. Make no mistake; there is a cost on this earth to follow Jesus. But it will be worth it all for the glory that awaits us when we see Jesus.

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. Phil. 1:29

"If we would follow Jesus we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence... The first step places the disciple in the situation where faith is possible. If he refuses to follow and stays behind, he does not learn how to believe. He who believes is obedient; and he who is obedient, believes (John 6:28, 29). Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son... There is trust in God, but no following of Christ." *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Cost of Discipleship.*

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He, who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. Psalm 126:5, 6
